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South Lebanon Annexation by Israel Feared

White House suspicion of Israel has become so intense that President Reagan's top advisers are now wondering whether Prime Minister Menachem Begin is planning the eventual annexation of southern Lebanon.

Secret reports shown to my associates Dale Van Atta and Ron McRae indicate why the White House is disturbed.

One secret State Department report, for example, had this to say on Sept. 15, as the Israeli invasion of West Beirut was proceeding apace: "There is a danger that Israel's 'logistical operations will evolve into permanent administrative agencies.'"

In other words, the suspicion is that Israel is in the process of building a military-civilian government for Israeli-occupied Lebanon.

The same pattern of Israeli infiltration that has been seen in the West Bank territories seems to be evolving in Lebanon. The ultra-nationalist extremist group, Gush Emunim, is planning to put Israeli settlements in southern Lebanon, according to U.S. reports.

If Begin follows his past action, he will not denounce these settlements for fear of criticism from hardline Israeli factions that are the bedrock of his political support. Instead, he will see that the bootleg settlements are hooked up to water and electricity to make them permanently viable.

The Gush Emunim and the Israeli Army's chief rabbi, Gen. Gad Navon, believe that God may be giving them southern Lebanon to compensate for Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai. The chaplain's support would be a key element in transforming temporary military governments into permanent civilian bodies.

A significant historical note should be mentioned here. It adds fuel to the White House suspicions.

A former Israeli prime minister, Moshe Sharett, published an intriguing account in 1978 of a meeting of Israeli defense and foreign policy officials. The meeting occurred 27 years ago, and quotes the late Moshe Dayan, then army chief of staff, as saying Lebanon was ripe for the picking.

"The only thing that's necessary is to find an officer, even just a major," Dayan said, according to the account. "We would either win his heart or buy him with money, to make him agree to declare himself the savior of the Maronite [Christian] population."

"Then the Israeli army will enter Lebanon, will occupy the necessary

territory and will create a Christian regime which will ally itself with Israel," Dayan reportedly continued. "The territory from the Litani [River] southward will be totally annexed by Israel and everything will be all right."

The Dayan scenario was followed to the letter, even to the choice of the cooperative Christian leader's military rank. Maj. Saad Haddad, a cashiered Lebanese officer, has been acting as Israel's puppet warlord in the Litani River area for years.

The secret Sept. 15 report predicted that Israel would try to bestow legitimacy on Haddad, possibly by insisting that he be included in any future Lebanese regime. His role in the massacres at the Palestinian refugee camps in West Beirut may have destroyed his chances, however.

Israel's covetous designs on southern Lebanon are explained in a top-secret CIA report, which states: "Hardliners in Israel have for years pointed out that Israel, by seizing territory up to the Litani River, would gain a more defensive border and a greater supply of water."

At the start of the West Beirut invasion, Begin assured Reagan in a private message that Israel "did not covet one inch of Lebanese territory." In early June, he had publicly declared in the Knesset that Israel didn't want "one square millimeter of Lebanese territory."

The White House no longer has faith in these assurances.